



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

MARK 1

JUNE 2021

THE KERYGMATIC OPTION

The history of the church is marked by periods of awakening or renewal. The Great Reformation in the sixteenth century is most prominent among various revivals in Europe, and the Great Awakenings in the United States had significant cultural impact. The early 20th century saw the Pentecostal movement begin, followed by the Charismatic movement with variations affecting most protestant denominations as well as Roman Catholic orders. The level of angst today in society in general and western civilization in particular suggests a deep longing for spiritual renewal and cultural reset. The people who believe that God acts in history in conjunction with the prayers of His people are engaging in prayer and asking: "What might a new awakening look like?" I offer a suggestion and a fervent hope: the kerygmatic option.

When Jesus first began His ministry, He announced the arrival of a new kingdom on earth:

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news'" (Mark 1:14-15 NRSV).

The kerygma is central to the message and mission of the church that Jesus founded. The text above is an example of kerygma. It is an announcement of something that has happened that demands a response from everyone who hears it. In this case, Jesus announced that the long-awaited kingdom of God had come to earth in real time. All the promises, prophecies, and predictions related to God's plan

to redeem and restore creation were being fulfilled in Jesus Himself. Notice that it is not first an exhortation to action, but an announcement of something God did and is continuing to do. It is so monumental that human response to it has eternal ramifications. "Announcement!"- this is the distinction of kerygma. God has acted by announcement since the beginning. He spoke and the various aspects of creation came into existence. When God speaks in any time period, things happen. His word itself carries power. Hearing it and believing brings transformation to the human heart.

The kerygma was absolutely essential to the formation of the early church. It was the heart of the sermon at Pentecost when Peter announced that what they were witnessing was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and that Jesus' appearance changed everything for everyone. He told what had been promised, how it was being fulfilled, and what the results of it would be. When the crowd asked what they should do, Peter told them the only right thing to do: repent and believe. He was saying that, since God has acted in history to do this marvelous thing, we must align our minds to this reality and live accordingly. This was also the heart of Paul's message at Antioch (Acts 13:16-41), before Agrippa (Acts 26), and to the Corinthian church (I Corinthians 15). It is the message upon which Paul established and maintained the churches under his care. All the ethical exhortations of the New Testament are based on it (Ephesians 4:17-32).

(continued next page)

Despite the transformational impact of the kerygma on the early church, the Christian message gradually changed as time elapsed. The adamic heart is innately more receptive to a message featuring the requirements of human response rather than a celebration of what God has done. We seem convinced that our betterment depends on us, and eventually we can do enough of the right things to qualify for God's smile and blessings. Additionally, we are always trying to remain relevant to the culture, wanting to grow in numbers of adherents. We adapt various forms of gospel terms that use the same words as Paul and Peter, but slightly twist them to be more palatable to the ears of the crowd.

With the dilution of the kerygma comes the loss of power in the word preached. After all, God promised that His word would succeed (Isaiah 55:11), not our adaptation of it. Some preachers seek to promote man-centered versions of the New Testament message, trying to look beyond the kerygma for power. That search has led the church through many iterations of Holy Spirit-related doctrines and experiences. Hungry to see the supernatural, we have been excited by people "falling under the power," gold dust in the air, holy laughter, or other manifestations. Of course all these could be signs that encourage us, but we err when we equate them with the power that raised Jesus from death and transforms lives like Paul's. It makes sense that when we neglect the purity of the original proclamation, the perspectives on pneumatology and spiritual formation are affected. Life in the kingdom is supernatural, and our heart longs for the power that is promised. If we don't experience it, we are prone to manufacture it.

When man-centered stories are told as the gospel, what is meant to be a declaration of what God has done is reduced to a proposition demanding adherence. Let's further examine some of the propositions being presented as "gospel."

Proposition One: "IT'S ABOUT BEING MORAL"
God has given us a book that tells us how to live and we will be given a test at the end. This doctrine focuses

on morality as defined by a cursory interpretation of the nature of scripture. Accordingly, the Bible is full of moral stories, heroic acts, principles, and laws. The Old Testament is primarily about Israel and the nations that relate to it, and the New Testament is about Jesus and how to go to heaven when we die. We are left with many questions about the identity of the people of God, the nature of a God who loves yet permits eradication of certain civilizations, and the role of Jesus in the arena of other religions. In this story, people are judged by how they live according to the laws and boundaries found in the Bible. Of course, there are numerous laws that don't seem applicable now and we aren't sure which to follow and which to attribute to a change in covenants. It has been relatively easy for some to disregard the Bible as viable because of the seemingly irrelevance of so much of it.

Proposition Two: "FIND THE PLAN; WORK THE PLAN" This story of principled living is akin to the first of viewing the Bible as a manual. God has ordered all of creation by His principles, and we are continuously discovering how intricate His order is and how certain those principles are. This is gloriously true, but it doesn't address the default in humanity that renders us incapable of fully being obedient to God's laws. Life surely works better on earth when we align with God's order, but what happens when we don't and can't? Even those who are relatively successful in applying the principles that make life flourish finally discover a dissatisfaction of heart that demands more. Finding the plan and working the plan seems to be a great formula for success, but it ultimately leads to delusion and despair. Those who are better at it condemn those who aren't, and those who fail are deemed disqualified for God's blessings. The inevitable conclusion is that God loves good people more than bad people, so we should be good. When we aren't, we are tempted to put on masks that hide our failures. Religious activity is a favorite mask. The morality of this story consists of man-centered efforts to improve. The missing ingredient is intimate fellowship with God Himself, which is His goal.

Proposition Three: “WE ARE BAD; GOD IS MAD” In this narrative, God is holy and cannot associate with anything or anyone who has defiled His holiness. He is angry at all sinful people, waiting for an opportunity to punish them. This leads to a fearful shyness about approaching God. It is best to stay away from an angry person, especially if He is all powerful. It means we live with a constant fear that destructive judgment could come any moment, and God will be justified in bringing it. As individuals and as a nation, we could reach the tipping point at any moment. This kind of morality features attempts to appease the angry God or to distance ourselves from Him. Some find themselves almost learning to love Jesus, but fearful of God the Father. In their story, Jesus is the good cop, but God the Father is still angry at us when we sin. After all, when we sin as Christians, we are showing disrespect toward the grace Jesus showed us, and the Father is even angrier. This story usually produces angry people. They seem to feel the need to defend God's justice and try to please Him by proclaiming judgment on sinning people around them. This story misses the point that God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Jesus' earthly life was about revealing the heart of the Father, not appeasing Him.

Of course there are many variations of these stories, but they all have a common flaw: They imply a transaction between us and God without a mediator. “If you will—then God will.” We are left with the perception that God has offered a proposition that when we give, He will give back. The deal begins with us. If I obey, then I will be blessed. But who has obeyed? Does God accept good intentions? Does He make allowance for deviations? Does He grade on the curve? Are His blessings proportional - 50% obedience gets 50% blessings? This story is very marketable. It sells to the human heart that wants to do something to aid self-improvement. It attracts the crowds that are eager to find the next new principle or formula that promises salvation from whatever is besetting us at the time: worry, fear, guilt, shame, obesity, addictions, etc.

Now let's compare these diluted propositions with

the kerygmatic gospel that Jesus, Peter, and Paul preached. Remember! The kerygma is a proclamation of an accomplished action - an announcement. It is not first a proposition, nor an exhortation. It is expressed in several important declarations.

Declaration One: God has acted in history to fulfill all previous prophecy by sending Jesus to do for creation what it could never do alone. The Christ-event is the climax of the story. Everything since creation has been moving toward this apex. All previous promises, predictions, and prophecies have their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. The story has moved from Adam to Jesus; from the garden of Eden to the garden of Gethsemane; from Abraham's Isaac to Jesus; from Israel to Christ; from King David to David's Ultimate Son; from land on earth to inheritance in all things; from temple of stone to temple of Jesus and His people; from old creation to new creation.

Declaration Two: The long awaited kingdom of God has dawned in the appearing of Christ. A new government has come to earth in the person of Jesus. His rule is now administered from His throne at the right hand of the Father, through His Spirit in His people. The future is settled and secure because the Ultimate Human has done what God required of humans. He already sits on the throne and waits until His rule is accomplished on earth.

Declaration Three: God has acted out of His heart of love to redeem that which sin and evil has perverted. His cure will reach further than the curse. He came incarnated in Jesus to live righteously, die sacrificially, arise victoriously, ascend bodily, and rule endlessly. This is God's heart revealed. He is not suppressing His justice, but expressing it. He loves His creation beyond our powers to perceive. He is active in His creation even when we are unable to see it. He paid the price for full redemption and will get its full value.

Declaration Four: The Holy Spirit is the sign that the kingdom of God is present now, and He is the life-giving power to know and love

(continued next page)

God now and forever. We are not left alone to live up to expected standards of behavior. He makes the intimate fellowship with the Triune God possible and real for those trusting in Jesus as Lord. He does not require our self-cleansing to deserve His presence. He is the gift of the Father to all the children who have believed.

Declaration Five: The announcement of the kerygmatic gospel demands a response. If, in fact, God has so acted, everything is affected. Upon hearing the announcement of what God has done, a choice is demanded. We either change our minds, our plans, and our expectations, or we deny the validity of the announcement.

We can easily see how these declarations confront the man-made propositions. They feature the centrality of Christ and His work. Our response is to what He has already done. There are several salient features we should note. The Bible is the story of God's revelation of Himself in history. He created out of love, desiring to have a people who enjoy ultimate delight. He gave humans the dignity of personal choice. When they chose to trust another, they found alienation from God, and were beset with fear, shame, and efforts to cover their nakedness. God continued to love and work in His creation to reveal the ultimate glory of His grace. He chose a certain group of people as a template to demonstrate the depth of sin's devastation and to produce a Savior for humanity. To show the inability of humans to live according to stipulations, He gave His perfect law to Israel and promised them fantastic blessings if they would obey. They couldn't, and they ended up losing everything they held dear. But out of that people there came a Savior who would keep covenant and pay for their broken vows. This person is the incarnate God who gave Himself to do what was necessary to redeem a people on earth who could delight in Him and thereby make His creation to flourish. He wasn't just trying to make people good rather than bad, but to reconcile them to Himself so that true fellowship could be experienced forever.

Of course there are principles of design to be discovered. It is necessary to discover them if we are to manage creation as His partners, but principles

alone leave us without the intimacy for which we are created. The ultimate principle is that a seed must die to life as a seed in order to become the plant that flourishes. Jesus did that, and He empowers us to die to our limited abilities and display His resurrected life. Biblical principles are important. Life with Jesus is supreme.

There is nothing humans can do to appease God or fully pay the debt to eternal justice. God has fulfilled justice by taking upon Himself in Christ the sin we committed. He does not tolerate sin by acting as if it doesn't matter. Neither does He relax the laws of justice in order to avoid consequences. He demands full payment. He paid it. We will only experience the wrath of God and the full consequences of sin if we ignore His grace.

The key to grasping grace is understanding that the primary transaction is between God the Father and Jesus the Son. God made a covenant with a human representative, and we get the benefits of His choices. We have nothing to trade that God needs. He is owner and Lord. We best relate to Him on the basis of mercy. We have nothing to offer and don't deserve anything. Yet He loves to show mercy.

Kerygmatic ethics is based on believing the new reality created by Jesus' finished work and His continued work through the Spirit. We are empowered to act according to our new identity as reconciled people. When we fall back into choices that are inconsistent with who we are as a result of being included in Jesus, we are exhorted to repent: Admit our wrong and believe the good news of His accomplished forgiveness. Our perspectives and behavior change as we live in the new reality. This is the kerygmatic option.



P.O. Box 2022
Colleyville, TX 76034
(817) 267-9224
Email: Contact@KerygmaVentures.com
www.KerygmaVentures.com